

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF NETAJI SUBHASH CHANDRA BOSE

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Abstract

Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose was one of the leading figures of the Indian freedom struggle. Officially his death was announced in 1945, the reason being stated as third degree burns from a plane crash. However due to conflicting facts, many doubt the reality of the reason given initially. Currently, there are three main theories coined, namely the Plane crash theory, the USSR theory and the Gumnami Baba theory.

Keyword: Plane crash, Gumnami Baba, slow poisoning

1. INTRODUCTION

On the 17th of August, two airplanes landed at an aerodrome in Saigon, currently known as Ho Chi Minh City. One of them was Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's personal 12 seater plane with a INA insignia on it with passengers very close to the Supreme Commander of the Azad Hind Fauj like Pritam Singh, Abid Hassan, SA Ayer and others and Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose. For the last time in history, the camera captured Netaji. Thereafter, Netaji eventually boarded a plane with only one of his aides, Habibur Rahman, that was later said to have crashed at Matsuyama aerodrome in Taihoku, Formosa (Taiwan today). Officially, Netaji had passed away due to third degree burns sustained in the crash. However, the facts conflict with each other and the testimonies of the witnesses have multiple versions of the tragedy. This led to many not believing the official declaration and many other theories came up. Currently there are three main theories, namely, the plane crash theory, the USSR theory and the Gumnami baba theory.

This paper aims to analyse the facts of the three theories and compare them

2. THE PLANE CRASH THEORY:

The plane crash theory is the official explanation provided for Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose's supposed death. According to this theory, Netaji had boarded a Mitsubishi Ki-21 bomber along with his close aide, Habibur Rahman, Lt. General Tsunama Shidei, Lt. Colonel Shiro Nonogaki, Major Taro Sakai and others on 17th August 1945. This plane landed in Tourane where the passengers spent the night before boarding the bomber on 18th August 1945. The said crash took place just as the bomber was taking off. This impact caused the death of Lt. General Shidei and the pilots while many passengers did survive with little to no injury. Netaji and Habibur Rahman tried to escape using the front entrance that was blocked by a firewall. This attempt resulted in Netaji who was drenched in gasoline, to become a human torch of fire. Despite Rahman's selfless attempt to help his leader, the head of the Arzi-e-hukumat Azad Hind has suffered third degree burns, eventually succumbing to them despite the efforts of Dr. Tenayoshi Yoshimi and was subsequently cremated at the Renkoji temple in Tokyo.

The reason behind the people not accepting this explanation lies mainly in the conflicting testimonies and suspicious evidences. For example, the name on the death certificate is of a Japanese man, Ichiro Okuro and the cause of death mentioned as heart failure while according to the testimony of Dr. Yoshimi, he had written the name on the death certificate as Chandra Bose, stating the reason as third degree burns. Moreover, according to the testimony of Habibur Rahman, he was sitting right beside Netaji who in turn was in front of the gasoline tank (this claim differed in a later testimony where he mentioned that the tank was beside the Kana Kanta), however, he was able to get out safe as the gasoline fell on Netaji. However rationally thinking,

it is nearly impossible for the gasoline to have drenched only Netaji and not Habibur Rahman if he was sitting close to Netaji. Moreover despite his claims of having torn the uniform of the leader open with his hands, no burns were visible on his hands. Another fact to be considered is a statement made by the state of Taiwan officially, clearly stating that there were no plane crashes in Taiwan from 14th August 1945 to 20th September 1945 (testimony to the landmark Mukherjee Commission under Justice MK Mukherjee). Statements, testimonies and evidences in general therefore, stand against this explanation.

3. THE USSR THEORY-

"Netaji didn't die in the plane crash. It was a theory floated to facilitate his escape to Soviet Union. Japanese intelligence agencies had floated the theory so that Bose can safely escape to Soviet Union,"

Maj Gen G D Bakshi (ret'd), ("Bose: The Indian Samurai - Netaji and the INA Military Assessment)

This theory was coined after several individuals claimed to have seen Netaji in the USSR. Purabi Roy, a member of the Indian Council of Historical Research, says that Netaji's presence in USSR can be proved upto 1956 and also claims that there are several files on the leader in the archives of Chief of Directorate near Moscow that have not been declassified and neither has the Indian government made any efforts to get them declassified. Iqbal Malhotra, a producer of documentaries, produced a documentary on this theory stating that theorises that the plane crash was fake and this alleged death was a decoy to cover up Netaji's escape to Vladivostok in USSR. According to Malhotra and several other scholars, Netaji's escape to the USSR was due to his strong belief that post the World War II, the global order would change and USSR would stand opposing the USA and Britain. According to this theory, Stalin and Netaji entered into a mutual agreement and joined hand. The main reason behind Stalin agreeing to Netaji's proposal might have been because of Stalin's regard that Netaji was an Indian leader who could easily challenge Nehru, who he believed to be a British stooge. However, post Stalin's death in 1953, the political environment in the USSR changed and Georgi Malenkov succeeded Stalin.

Consequently, Netaji was sent to Siberia where he was killed by slow poisoning.

However, this theory has no substantive proof except for hearsay and hence is more often than not, discarded.

4. GUMNAAMI BABA THEORY-

"I am just a will o' the wisp...It is born, does its work, runs around, stays still for a while, vanishes from one place and then shows up at another. It manifests itself but it cannot be caught. I am just not here. I have no existence.

My name has been crossed out from human register"
Gumnami Baba

This is by far the most talked about and with adequate support, the most probable explanation. According to this theory, Netaji remained in India in the guise of a saint popularly known as Gumnami Baba or Bhagwan ji who confined himself to the premises of Ram Bhawan in Faizabad. He remained in a room behind a curtain with the ruse that he was in sadhna which forbade him from appearing in public. Going on the other side of the curtain, one would find a big built man with his face covered and mostly adorning a monkey cap. He would mostly communicate by writing on a slate and would prefer any piece of paper he had written on to either be in his custody or be destroyed. According to the few people that he met (which included members of the Bose family as well) he would usually keep to himself and if he had to go out it would be at night after being wrapped up sufficiently to prevent recognition. One person who remained in contact with Bhagwan ji from 1955 to 1985 was the former king of Itawa, Surendra Singh Chauhan, who is considered to be Bhagwanji's closest aide. While in Lucknow, the mysterious God man had a close friendship with the then Chief Minister of Delhi, Mr. Sampurnanand. The papers related to Mr. Sampurnanand at the National Archives in New Delhi give a testimony of his close association with Netaji in the 1920s. In 1962, Professor Atul Sen, a freedom fighter acquainted with the likes of M.K.Gandhi, Nehru and Netaji, was brought to the temple complex where Bhagwan ji was residing due to some medical emergency. Upon his return to Kolkata, he promptly informed his close friend, RC Majumdar, a historian that he had spoken to "Subhash Bose" and had even written a letter to the then Prime Minister, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru on 28th August 1962, which now lies in one of the PMO

files to which Mr.Nehru had replied in a seemingly hasty and "somewhat odd way", as journalist Anuj Dhar writes in his book "What Happened to Netaji?". In the letter, Nehru denies the government of India having bound itself to any such claim of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose being alive, despite there being several commissions being formed to find out the truth behind Netaji's alleged death.

On top of all these testimonies of having identified Bhagwan ji as Netaji by people closely related or at least having worked with Netaji, several of his possessions and habits, are same as that of Netaji. Celebration of Bhagwanji's birthday on 23rd January with "Ilish maach" and cake from a Jewish bakery, ownership of telescopes that normally are used in battle, pictures and artifacts in relation to the Bose family, golden watches with a circular dial etc. According to Lalita Bose, Netaji's niece, Bhagwan ji's handwriting completely matched with her uncle's and there were letters from her own mother, addressed to "Subi".

However, all this proofs are challenged by a coinciding event of a murderer escaping arrest and putting up a disguise of a holy man. A similar incident was also seen in Shoulmari, Cooch Behar, where a holy man was falsely identified as Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose.

5. CONCLUSION

The official explanation for the death of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose has many loopholes and contradicting testimonies. The USSR theory has no substantive proof to support it except for the accounts of individuals claiming to have seen him who were silenced by the government agents. The Gumnaami Baba theory on the other hand has substantive proof and is backed by enough physical testimonies and evidences. The fact that Netaji was spiritual and had, in his adolescent years, run away from home in order to take up sanyas answers any argument that a military leader cannot become a saint. This theory was backed by the Bose family till 2018 after which they became a crusader for the Plane crash theory. Most historians and researchers, including Anuj Dhar and Adheer Som, agree that the Gumnaami Baba theory answers mostly all the questions.

6. QUESTIONS RAISED:

1. To what extent is the official explanation behind Netaji's death plausible ?
2. What was the ultimate fate of Netaji?

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